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HOW SHALL I LIVE?

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READER, you have but one life to live. Would you not know how you may most enjoy this one life? On it hangs your eternal destiny. Would you not secure from it a destiny of the highest possible bliss? Can any inquiry then be more interesting or important than this: "How shall I live?" How, so as to make the most of the present life, and at the same time make sure of eternal life? Never did this question receive a more complete, comprehensive, beautiful and impressive answer than in the words of the great apostle of the Gentiles, in his epistle to the Philippian Church, ch. 1:17, "To me to live is Christ."

When Paul wrote these words he was a prisoner at Rome. But he was not desponding, or even sad. No epistle he ever wrote seems so full of gladness as this. Yet he had, one would think, abundant cause for sadness. He was, day and night, chained to a Roman soldier, his life at the mercy of the most capricious tyrant that ever sat on the Roman throne; his presence and labors seemed to be greatly needed in the churches; and his heart longed to be again sweeping over whole continents with that untiring activity that was part of his very nature, proclaiming the glory of his Master; but still every word and look and tone gave evidence of a joyous heart. The reason of this is found in these words: "For to me to live is Christ." This drew joy from his very sorrows.

In these words he completely identifies himself with Christ. He knows nothing of living apart from Christ, any more than a limb apart from the body. All his desires, expectations, plans, purposes, labours, sufferings, enjoyments, his preaching and his silence, his activity and his confinement—all had a constant reference to Christ, and derived their character from Christ, and in every possible way were full of Christ. In Christ, by Christ, and for Christ he lived in his inward experience and his outward walk.

To most men this is a strange kind of life. It is so far above the range of their living, so far out of the ordinary

course of men's thoughts, that they regard it as almost, if not altogether, mystical. Even Christians look upon it too often as indicating a height of spiritual attainment to be wondered at and admired, rather than to be aimed at. Such language, they think, may do very well for Paul, and perhaps for ministers of the gospel, or at most a few other exceptional cases, but that they ought or even could use it, has never entered their minds. Hence they have hardly ever clearly set before themselves its full and true meaning, and never have felt their obligations to realize it in their own experience. Hence, too, so many go creeping and hobbling along the narrow way with scarcely anything of the vigour of a lively faith or the joy of a confident hope. Hence many know not whether they are in that way at all, and travel on through life doubtfully, not sure whether they belong to God or the devil, whether they are going to heaven or to hell. A most wretched condition for a rational and immortal creature! And yet such it must be, while to live is anything else than Christ. This Christ-life of the apostle ought to be the life of every one; and it must be of every christian, else doubt, backsliding, sorrow and disgrace, will attend it. What then is implied in it?

The life of every intelligent moral being implies clearly an end, a motive, a rule, and a joy. Every man has something to live for, some motive controlling him, some rule to direct him, and there is something in which he finds enjoyment. These give character to his life. If his end be noble, his motive pure, his rule correct and fixed, his whole life will be full of moral beauty and power. And if his end, his motive, his rule and his joy all centre in one single object, concentrating all the energies of his being in one direction, it will throw around the character a dignity and massive strength and force not otherwise attainable. If, moreover, that one object be the best, the loveliest, the grandest the universe contains, such a life will be as God-like as any life on earth can be. Such was Paul's. To him Christ was both end and motive, rule and joy.

1. First, *the glory of Christ was the end of his life*. From the memorable moment when struck to the earth, he cried out "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" till he yielded up that life in the agonies of martyrdom, the glory of his Master appears to have been his only aim. Every desire of his soul

seems to be subordinate to this—and not only subordinate, but actually to derive all its strength from this, and also to be a tributary stream flowing into the general current of this great purpose, swelling its volume and augmenting its force. Neither worldly ease, nor honor, nor reputation, nor any earthly or selfish consideration seems to have hidden from his view for a moment that one object. Whether he delayed in Antioch, or Ephesus, or Corinth, or swept over all Western Asia, and Macedonia and Greece in rapid missionary tours, encountering every peril from elements and beasts and men; whether claiming the protection of a Roman citizen, or appealing to Caesar, or in bonds at Cesarea or Rome, we can never find a trace of any other object influencing his aims, than the glory of Christ. With intense earnestness indeed, did he press on in the heavenly race for the prize of his own salvation; but that prize he always saw, as held forth by the pierced hands of his glorified Lord; and at every step as you see him reaching forth his eager hands toward it, you may hear from his grateful lips the ascription of all honor to Christ, the utter renunciation of all self-confidence and glorifying in the flesh, counting everything but loss, that he may win Christ and be found in him to the praise of the glory of his grace. "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of his faith," is the motto of his life. Thus glorifying in him, he with equal earnestness seeks to proclaim to others—to the whole world—his matchless wisdom, power and love; to establish his reign in other hearts, and to extend his kingdom over all the nations, till at his feet every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

Now what higher or nobler end than this can any rational creature have? The glory of him who made the world and died to redeem it, his glory in the accomplishment of the object for which he died—the salvation of a perishing world, the destruction of sin and Satan, the triumph of redeeming love. That his word, which alone can dispel the darkness of the nations, should be everywhere proclaimed and received; that his blood and righteousness which alone can save from the grasp of the curse and the jaws of hell, should be everywhere trusted in; and he himself crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords; this is the only object worthy of the highest devo-

tion and efforts of any one of that race for whom all this redeeming mercy has been manifested. It ought to be the end, reader, of your life. It must be, or your life will be thrown away, and will result in the blackness of eternal disappointment and despair. You must live for Christ, or you must die the second death. You must live for Christ, or your life must be an awful, an eternal failure. Live for the world, for its wealth, its honors, its domestic joys, or even its political freedom; have no higher ends than society, reputation, or country can set before you, however excellent in themselves; and when life's short course is run, what have you gained? Better you had never been born, than to have so completely failed in attaining the end of your being.

Is it then, Christ, for *you* to live? Is his glory your great end in all your plans and pursuits; in the formation and perpetuation of your friendships, in the intercourse of daily life, in the prosecution of your business, in your efforts to make money and in the use you make of it, in your labors for your family, and in your zeal and sacrifices for your country? Is it Christ you are living for, or self, or some mere earthly end? The very idea of a Christian is to live for Christ; just as the miser lives for money, the fond but worldly parent for his children, the ambitious for power and fame, the mere patriot for his country, so a Christian is one who lives for Christ; to whom property, family, reputation and country are all dear, just so far as they are means of promoting the glory of Christ. Christ's own solemn declarations settle this matter. "Who-soever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple." See also Matt. 10:27-40, and Luke 14:26. It is not enough to have this as one end along with others, which, though less important, are still independent. Just so far as you allow any object, no matter how good in itself, or even necessary, even your food, your health, your family, to be regarded independently of Christ, for its own sake, for your mere gratification, just so far do you come short of the high end of life and fail in meeting your obligations to a loving Saviour.

And here is one great source of the feebleness of Christian character. So many live for a variety of objects, not only for those right in themselves, pursuing them as distinct ends, irrespective of Christ, and thus dividing their energies, but

very often for conflicting objects, and thus introducing discord into the soul itself; that it is no wonder that indecision and inconsistency characterize so large a part of the visible church. Union is strength nowhere more than in the soul itself. Decision and energy is the result of the concentration of one's whole powers upon a single great and worthy object. This can be fully done only when that object is Christ. Nothing else in all the universe can fully unite the powers of the soul. A man may indeed give himself up exclusively to some inferior object; he may evince a vast energy in gratifying his lust of power, or pleasure, or sensual indulgence; but in doing so he has to crush his moral nature, to benumb his sensibility and hush the voice of conscience, to hide from his eyes the God that made him and the awful judgment to which he is hastening. Such a man instead of being an example of real strength of soul, is only an example of the power of sin and the devil over the soul, dragging it onward, in opposition to its own better judgment to gratify a reigning lust, to its own eternal ruin. It is only when the object is one that brings the heart into peace with God and harmony with his will, that it can develop the full strength and energy of a human soul. This can be found only in Christ, whose glory is the great end in Creation, Providence and Redemption, and in whom are found all that is lovely, and desirable for sinful man. It was this that made Paul's character the grandest, noblest, loveliest that ever the grace and power of God has ever spread out for the gaze and imitation of his church. When you can say with him, "To me to live is Christ," his glory is the one end of my life, then every element of weakness is cast out; and just in proportion as you are enabled by divine grace to carry out this high purpose, this single consecration, will your path be one radiant with moral beauty and power, on which angels will gaze with admiring delight. But if you would realize this highest attainment of a redeemed sinner, you must be able to say also with Paul, as implied in these words of his—

2. *The love of Christ is the motive of my life.* It is so in every Christian; it was eminently so in Paul. "The love of Christ," says he, "constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then did all die: and that he died for all

that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again." It is Christ's love to him in thus dying for him, to which the apostle attributes this constraining power. God has so constituted the human heart that nothing so subdues and melts and constrains it as love. Even the hardened criminal, if once convinced, (a task, however, of extreme difficulty,) that he is the object of a true disinterested love, will be melted into tenderness. But when that love is the infinite love of Christ, and when in its outgoings it opens the eyes and touches the heart of a sinner so as to see and feel its magnitude and tenderness, it must move the soul as no mere earthly influence ever can. Can you believe that the Son of God yearned over you with infinite compassion from eternity; that he then engaged, in full view of all the humiliation and agony it would cost him, to redeem you; that though God, equal with the Father, and having all power and the homage of the universe, he bowed himself to the feebleness and woes of our accursed race, and suffered the fearful penalty, which injustice he might have inflicted upon us; that he has bestowed on us the matchless gift of the Holy Ghost to renew our polluted natures, and to fit us for a destiny of endless glory and joy in bearing his own image and dwelling in his own joyous presence: can you, oh! can you believe that it was for you—all full of pollution and enmity and guilt—that he thus gave, not the worlds he made, —they would have been worthless—nor merely the mighty energies of his power, nor merely the boundless resources of his wisdom; but *himself*, his own person in the flesh, to a life of suffering obedience, to the endurance of the Father's wrath, the infliction of the curse, the buffetings of Satan: can you believe all this, and not feel the constraining power of such a love sweetly chaining your soul to him and swallowing up in it all other affections. Do you profess to be a Christian! Surely then that cross where first, looking up, you saw his forgiving grace, and felt the burden of your sins rolled away, must ever be dear to your heart above all other objects. A love that has such heights and depths, and lengths and breadths, that so passeth knowledge, if seen and felt at all, must be seen and felt with tremendous power. Before its influence all other motives must wane into utter feebleness.

When it rises on the soul in its sun-like glory, every other power must, like the stars of night, be lost in its beams, and every rival light be regarded with utter abhorrence. Yes, dear reader, if you have ever felt its power, then Christ must be to you the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely. If you ever gazed by faith upon his lovely features, if you ever saw his pierced hands, and feet, and side, if you ever heard his voice, declaring in tones sweeter than a mother's love, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" and if you can now look down into that deep, dark pit of sin and woe and wrath, where, in the misery clay your feet were sunk, and whence your cry of agony arose for help, and from which his arm of power and love reaching down lifted you up, oh! how can you help but yield your whole soul to the sweet influence of his love—how can you help but say, "to me to live is Christ," his love is the grand motive of my life.

Do not I love thee from my soul?
Then let me nothing love;

Dead be my heart to every joy,
Which thou dost not approve.

Love is no inactive emotion. It was not as it dwelt in the bosom of Christ. No more can it be in yours. Shall the love of a mere creature be a motive that often with controlling power sways the whole soul and sweeps away in its broad current every other feeling, and shall the love of Christ exert an inferior force? Never, never. It must lead you to testify its influence, in toils and self-denials for him and his cause.—Laying its hand of power on your heart, it must, it will break the chains of all unholy and worldly desires, and make the narrow way with all its ruggedness, the upward path with all its toils and self-denials, to be like Eden blessed.

3. Again, the will of Christ must be the rule of your life. The very first utterance of the new life in Paul was,—*"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"* and that will never ceased to be his law. To him it was of no consequence to be judged of other men's judgments; the frowns and smiles of the world, or even of mistaken Christian friends formed no part of his rule; he only longed to approve himself to his master's eye. So it must be to all who would share his salvation. Simple, childlike, unconditional obedience is the very life of the Christian. There may not be any parleying, any excuses, any apologies. *"Have not I commanded thee?"*

is the stirring word of cheer with which he dispels all our fears and rebukes all our delays; and surely it ought to be enough to bear us onward in the hardest duties and the most perilous enterprises, with a zeal and self-sacrificing courage, greater than that high enthusiasm with which the soldiers even of an earthly leader rush into the most fearful perils at his single word of command. His will is expressed not only in his word, but in his example. As you pass along in your pilgrimage, and the way seems dark, and temptations thicken, and opposition rises, and the world allures, if you can only catch a glimpse of his living form in the way before you, and hear his voice saying firmly, "Follow me," new strength is imparted, and all obstacles vanish. Paul saw and heard these through all the persecuting rage and violence of envious Jews, and ignorant idolators, and all the gloom and terror of foreseen and most cruel sufferings, and pressed onward unterrified and unfaltering. The noble army of the martyrs, through all the smoke and fires and terrors of martyrdom, saw that bleeding form of the Captain of their salvation, and heard his inspiring call, and passed on through all with a shout of triumph to his side. And all the vast cloud of witnesses in every age, from the learned sage and the throned monarch to the most unlettered and despised child of poverty and woe, saw through all the glare of earthly glory, and all the deep darkness of all mingled woes, and all the false lights of the wily tempter, that same form of matchless love and meekness, and felt those words of his ring thro' their inmost souls, "Take up thy cross and follow me;" and thro' many tears and much tribulation they passed on to share in his kingdom and glory. You can have no share in his saving grace, if you shrink from putting your feet in his bleeding footprints. Paul says he consulted not with flesh and blood, when called to his work of self-denial and suffering; and here is the great difficulty with many now. They consult, and often very long and tenderly too, with flesh and blood; and because some duties are trying and demand much self-denial, they beg off from them, or at least delay them, and so shut themselves out from the evidence of his favor, and bring dishonor on themselves and the church. It is the command of Christ, enforced by his example, that every follower of his should give his personal ef-

forts to save souls, and should use his property and influence in the one leading object of extending his kingdom; but how many do neither the one nor the other; or do them so feebly that their very efforts serve to show the extent of their disobedience. Surely such can never unite with the apostle in these words: "to me to live is Christ," in their fourth and last sense.

4. *Christ is the joy of my life.* This is true of every real believer, and ought to be true in a far higher degree of most than it is. No happier man ever lived than Paul. He could rejoice even in tribulation. And this, just because he found his bliss in promoting the glory of Christ, in feeling the power of his love, and in doing and suffering his will. For the same reason ought the joy of every Christian to abound, and it must do so if he seeks it only in the service, the love and the will of Christ. With such a blessed work to do—always in all things working for Christ,—with such a love to enjoy, and such an unerring rule to guide him, he may ever say, 'to me, the joy of my life is Christ.' Christ is the joy of his life, because he is enjoyed in all things, not merely in seasons of special duty and devotion; it is a joy this which infuses itself into *all* his living. This is *his world*, not only made by his power, but bought with his blood, and governed by his providence, and held in being by his death on the cross: so that every temporal blessing, even the sunshine and the rains of heaven, the air we breathe, his food and all his domestic joys, and every other mercy comes to the believer from his bleeding hands and with the stain of his blood upon them; and every cross is laid upon him by the same loving hand.—Christ thus seen in every thing, fills the whole life with a deep and steady joy. No sorrow can drown it; the strains of the new song send forth their sweetest melody from the crushed heart in the dark night of affliction.

Oh! 'tis not in grief to harm me,
While thy bleeding love I see;

Oh! 'tis not in joy to charm me,
When that love is hid from me.

Thus we have with the aid of Paul, or rather of the Spirit of God by whom Paul spake, answered the inquiry—How shall I live? There is, there can be, no other life worthy of a rational, accountable, immortal creature. Every other must be fraught with misery, disappointment, remorse and ruin.—

Now what consideration can the cunning tempter bring to deter you from at once taking Christ as the end, the motive, the rule and the joy of your life, so that you can say with Paul, "to me to live is Christ?" Do you not see that here and only here is the true secret of enjoying this life to the utmost, as well as being always ready to die? You see here, too, how in these troubled times, when all earthly things are felt to be so insecure, when so many hearts are wrung with anguish, or filled with fearful anticipations, when the heavy cloud of the divine judgments covers our sky, and the storm of God's wrath is descending upon a guilty nation, the heart may rest in peace, a sweet, cheerful peace. The reason of our undue anxieties and distress in regard to our country and ourselves is that Christ is not all in all to us, as he was to Paul. Paul was a patriot, he loved his country as only a Jew could,—a country hallowed by ages of glorious and holy memories and God's most wonderful works; he saw the storm then gathering which he knew in a little while was to deluge it in blood and scatter his people into hopeless slavery and exile,—but he also saw what we can see in every convulsion of our own times, the Kingdom of Christ rising steadily and gloriously amid these ruins; and so even here, Christ was his joy. Oh, if only it is Christ to us to live, if he is our great end, our ruling motive, our law and our joy; then these storms, furious and desolating though they be, will not greatly disturb our peace. But we have other ends than Christ's glory, and other motives than Christ's love, and other rules of action than Christ's will, and other sources of joy in which Christ has no part. Hence the necessity of these fearful judgments, to cut us off from these low and selfish ends, to purge out these conflicting loves and affections and low principles and rules of action and mere worldly joys, in order that we may make him our highest end and motive and rule and joy.—When we have done this, and can truly say, "to me to live is Christ;" then shall the sting of sorrow be extracted, all our anxious fears subside, and every lawful joy gain a new and richer zest; and as we journey on we shall ever sing, "The Lord Christ is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

Does the tempter, however, suggest that this high attain-

ment is too much to expect of you, my friend? Too much to expect—when God requires it, Jesus died for it, and the Holy Ghost is offered and bestowed to effect it! Too much, when this is the very end of the whole scheme of redemption, which if not attained in your case, you are eternally undone, forever unbenefitted by all his wonderful mercy of God. Do you claim to be a reasonable creature? Is it too much to expect of you then, that you will seek the noblest end with a single undeviating purpose; that you will love the loveliest being in the universe, and him who died to redeem you, with a supreme unflinching love; and that you will make his holy and gracious will, and his bright example your only rule!—And this too when he invites you to come to him, and receive all the might of the Spirit, all the treasures of his grace to help you thus to live!

Are you a professed follower of Christ? Surely nothing less can ever be expected of you. Anything less is the basest ingratitude to him who died for you. All beings expect it of you thus to live. The devil expects it; the world expects it; a whole universe of holy intelligences expect it as they gaze upon the love and power and glory of Christ's redemption; the Holy Ghost expects it, for he pledges to you his almighty indwelling power to enable you to do it; and more than all, Christ himself expects it, as now on his throne of glory with all the infinite love of his heart and all the mighty power of his arm, he is working for this very end in regard to all his redeemed. He calls upon you by all the love you owe to him, by all the interests of your own helpless but undying soul, by all the priceless worth of other perishing souls, many of whom are trembling on the very brink of eternity, and by all the woes of a sin accursed world to unite heart and soul and hands, promptly, earnestly, lovingly, in the one great work of glorifying him, consecrating your whole life to his service. What says your heart? I know its quick response, if that heart has ever been touched by his love, and if you have any claim to a share in his salvation. "Lord what wouldst thou have me to do?"

Here at thy feet where flows the blood,
That bought my guilty soul for God,
Thee, my new Master now I call,
And consecrate to thee my all.

Do thou assist a feeble worm,
The great engagement to perform;
Thy grace can full assistance lend,
And on that grace I dare depend.

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"Here is my heart ; surely the gift, though poor,
My God will not despise ;
Vainly and long I sought to make it pure,
To meet thy searching eyes ;
Corrupted first in Adam's fall,
The stains of sin pollute it all,
My guilty heart.

"Here is my heart ; in Christ its longings end,
Near to his cross it draws :
It says, 'Thou art my portion, O my Friend,
Thy blood my ransom was.'
And in the Saviour it has found
What blessedness and peace abound ;
My trusting heart.

"Here is my heart : ah, Holy Spirit, come,
Its nature to renew,
And consecrate it wholly as thy home,
A temple fair and true.
Teach it to love and serve thee more,
To fear thee, trust thee, and adore :
My cleansed heart.

"Here is my heart ; teach it, O Lord, to cling
In gladness unto thee ;
And in the day of sorrow still to sing,
Welcome my God's decree.
Believing, all its journey through,
That thou art wise, and just, and true :
My waiting heart.

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